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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2691  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 5285  
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 2897  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 3915  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 8523  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 0979  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 002511

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, AF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2010

TAGS: MO PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: DEPUTY FM ON VISIT OF MAURITANIAN JUNTA LEADER FAL

REF: A. RABAT 2475

¶B. RABAT 2425

¶C. NOUAKCHOTT 1320 AND PREVIOUS

RABAT 00002511 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Pol/C Timothy Lenderking for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) During a wide-ranging meeting on December 1 (Refs A and B), Ambassador asked Deputy FM Fassi Fihri for a read-out of Mauritanian junta leader Fal's November 20-21 visit to Morocco. Colonel Fal met with King Mohammed in Marrakech on November 21, and the visit was widely covered in the Moroccan press. The two countries signed agreements in the field of agriculture, fisheries, and drinking water. Most importantly for the Moroccans, Colonel Fal publicly underscored Mauritanian support for a solution to the Western Sahara issue agreed to by all parties under the auspices of the United Nations.

¶2. (C) Fassi Fihri told the Ambassador that Morocco was interested in Mauritania for strategic reasons. While Morocco did not appreciate "for legal and political reasons" the method in which the junta had seized power, the situation in Mauritania was better now than it was a year ago. There was a new dynamic in the country. Morocco believed Colonel Fal was delivering; there was no contradiction between what he promised to do and what he was doing. In fact, Fal had advanced the transition period toward elections to March 2007, Fassi Fihri pointed out.

¶3. (C) Fassi Fihri said Fal sought King Mohammed's advice on the transition to democracy. The King told him to stay on the track he is on and not disappoint the expectations he had created.

¶4. (C) According to Fassi Fihri, there is strong competition between political parties in Mauritania in light of the upcoming elections, and some parties were reaching out to Moroccan political parties for dialogue and support. Fassi Fihri said Morocco did not want to encourage such contacts without discussing the issue first with Fal. During his visit, Fal assured Morocco such contacts were not a problem.

¶5. (C) Fassi Fihri noted the political season would start heating up in earnest in Mauritania in the spring, and the competition would be intense, perhaps creating "tension,"

especially as individual candidates were announced. What would happen to ex-President Taya's party, for example, of which current Mauritanian Ambassador to Morocco Cheyakh Ould Ely was a member, Fassi Fihri wondered? Ambassador Ould Ely tried to impress upon the GOM the importance of his party as a counterweight to the Islamists. "Don't forget about us," he says. Fassi Fihri said Fal did not believe he could open the political space for the Islamists. Some groups were establishing links with the Islamists and presenting themselves as having foreign support. He said as far as the GOM could tell "no one" in Mauritania was talking about ex-President Taya.

¶6. (C) Fassi Fihri said the important thing was to avoid surprises in Mauritania. One area of concern was the participation of the "Black Moors" in the political process. Taya had pushed many of them into Senegal; Morocco intervened to bring them back, more than 10,000 people. Fal had told the Moroccans the reintegration needed to happen slowly.

¶7. (C) Fassi Fihri said Morocco understood US concerns about the regime in Nouakchott, but on the whole Mauritania was better off now than before; it was more open, more democratic. Fal had advanced the timetable for elections as far as he could. March 2007 was less than 18 months away. It could not be sooner than that. The economic situation in Mauritania was bad, though Mauritania was "anticipating" the revenue from oil, even making sales before production. The US should be pragmatic about Mauritania, Fassi Fihri advised, welcoming further discussion between the US and Morocco on this subject.

¶8. (C) Fassi Fihri added that Mauritania is a frequent topic of discussion between Morocco and Libya.

Comment

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¶9. (C) As this meeting suggests, Morocco takes a keen

RABAT 00002511 002.2 OF 002

interest in Mauritania. Morocco's primary equities are maintaining Mauritanian support for Morocco's position on the Western Sahara issue, ensuring stability on its southern flank, and maintaining a hospitable climate in Nouakchott for Moroccan economic interests. Maroc Telecom owns a majority stake in Mauritanian telephone company Mauritel, and several Moroccan banks and insurance companies are represented there.

In recent years the Government of Morocco has provided assistance to Mauritania in the areas of education and military leadership training (Colonel Fal attended a military training school in Morocco), and provided substantial in-kind and monetary assistance during the desert locust invasion in ¶2004. Morocco moved quickly to establish positive contact with the Fal junta following the coup, dispatching security chief Yassine Mansouri with a message from the King in August. The GOM has wasted little time in sizing up and making known its support for the new regime in Nouakchott.

Bush